

JULY 1980

WESTWAYS

ONE DOLLAR



Holder Called the Tuna

By John Espey



AT THE NORTH END of Avalon's waterfront promenade a large rock bears two weathered bronze plaques commemorating the founder of the Tuna Club, itself about thirty yards farther on as one walks toward the Casino. One bears the insigne of the Tuna Club and reads:

HOLDER MEMORIAL ROCK
DEDICATED TO HIS MEMORY
BY HIS FRIENDS IN THE
TUNA CLUB
1926

The other, under a bas-relief of Charles Frederick Holder in profile, reads:

CHARLES	AUTHOR
FREDERICK	NATURALIST
HOLDER	SPORTSMAN

1851-1915

THIS TABLET IS PLACED
HERE BY FRIENDS OF THE
NATURALIST WHO DEVOTED
HIMSELF TO THE
PRESERVATION OF WILD
GAME AND SEA LIFE; WHO
AWAKENED THE PUBLIC
CONSCIENCE TO THE
RIGHTS OF BIRD AND BEAST
AND FISH, AND WHOSE
WORK WON AT ONCE THE
APPROVAL OF SPORTSMEN
AND THE TRIBUTES OF
NATIONS

Though the Tuna Club itself may at

first glance look little different from the earliest pictures of it to be found in the club's photograph books, it is actually larger than the original structure, which burnt in 1915, shortly after Holder's death.

In his work, *The Channel Islands of California* (1910), Holder described the original clubhouse:

"On the left is the locker room for rods, reels, lines, and the paraphernalia of the sea-angler. The upper part of the building is devoted to sleeping-rooms. The front of the second story is a sun piazza, from which the angler may look out on the tuna fishing-grounds. Passing through the hall to the front, the visitor enters the large living-room, with heavy oaken beams, all in browns and russets. The room has comfortable furniture, a library of the principal angling books of the day, and various old ones. An interesting feature of the library is the number of autograph copies of works on angling by members of the club. Dr. Henry Van Dyke, F. G. Aflalo, Gifford Pinchot, Caspar Whitney, Charles Hallock, David Starr Jordan, Theodore Van Dyke, Grover Cleveland, Charles F. Holder, and others have contributed their works. On the table are the big silver cups of various branch clubs, as the Three-Six and the Light Tackle, filled with the semi-tropical flowers of the island. On the table are angling and other magazines and publications of the day. Here are charts and maps of the coast; for many of the members are yachtsmen, their yachts lying in the bay. . . ."

Today, the brass plate reading "Club Members Only" glistens, and George Branzell, the manager, speaks of continuing family memberships and weekend parties that carry on the social life of the founders, even though tuna fishing, as Holder developed it, is no longer an important feature of channel angling.

The cups survived the fire, but they stand now in a glass case. The books burned, and though a locked case holds a fair representation of Holder's own work, the long shelves at the north end of the lounge contain standard sets and individual volumes of the first quarter of the century, largely American, and generally undisturbed, one gathers, the bindings sticking together slightly from the salt air and lack of use. But the club's current decor remains faithful to the self-consciously "rustic" style of a generation that took pride in being unpretentious but still required solid comfort for its recreation. Holder writes with the same assumptions of modest worth that led him to mention his own books (last in the list, of course), when he says, "The Tuna Club was founded by me in 1898, with the object of establishing a high standard of sport in all California."

By the time Holder arrived in Pasadena in 1885, he was already a well-known figure in scientific circles. Born in Lynn, Massachusetts,



on August 5, 1851, he had entered the U.S. Naval Academy as a member of the class of 1864, but did not graduate. His father had been one of the organizers of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and from 1871 to 1875 his son served there as assistant curator of

zoology. He had already picked up a taste for outdoor life during his father's collecting expeditions to the Florida reefs, and his first substantial publication, *Elements of Zoology* (1884), remained for years a standard text.

Holder's earlier books, such as *The Ivory King* (1886), a detailed account of the elephant, including details of its use in war by the Greeks and the Romans, smack a little of the library, though in *Marvels of Animal Life* (1885) he makes

coast. On his first visit to Catalina he had seen yellowtail and tuna hauled in with heavy cod-lines, the fish once hooked certain to be landed. Feeling that the continuation of such methods would soon decimate the supply, he set about showing that these fish could be taken by rod and reel on relatively light lines, and he praised the "manliness" of this for putting the fisherman and the fish on something like equal terms.

With all Holder's emphasis on the



Avalon's Tuna Club: an eighty-year tradition

the point that at least a part of the material comes from his own stay on a coral reef and others from "memories of my practical collecting tours." But he relished a sense of adventure always and clearly delighted in the possibility that sea-serpents might truly exist.

A life member of the New York Academy of Science, Holder was asked to write a life of Charles Darwin (1891) for Putnam's Men of Science series, and followed it with a life of Agassiz (1893). But his real interest lay in the outdoors and his own participation in sports. A genteel *Ur-Hemingway* note runs through his discussion of angling for game fish off the California

"manliness" of this sport, he was clearly somewhat embarrassed to have to acknowledge that the second largest black sea bass—415 pounds—to be taken in his day was played by not only a woman, but, in the vocabulary of the day, a "lady." In his chapter on this fish in *Big Game Fishes of the United States* (1903) Holder included a photograph of the fish and its taker without identifying her. But later more gentlemanly instincts prevailed and we learn that she was, in the parlance of the time, Mrs. General Andrew Barrett, wife of the officer who would succeed Holder himself as the club's president. Surely Mrs. Barrett retired to change before pos-



ing for the obligatory photographs, one showing her with her gaffer, the other displaying her alone, grasping the dorsal fin of her gigantic catch. From time to time in his writing Holder indicated that this kind of fishing could be undertaken successfully by women, but always



Its founder Charles Frederick Holder

pretty much in the spirit of the well-polished brass plate reading "LADIES HOURS 9 A.M.-5 P.M." that protects the precincts of the club even today.

Holder delights in recording the catches of such early conservationists as Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, and in one amusing passage he tells of how he and his gaffer took out an Easterner who wore an overcoat against the weather. After the tuna had been hooked and brought to the gaff, the small boat capsized and Holder discovered that his guest could not swim. Nothing daunted, Holder held him up until he could get a hold on the overturned boat, mean-

while wondering why his gaffer, an experienced swimmer, kept going under. He soon discovered, when all had been rescued, that the gaffer had refused to give up the catch, and with an arm through one of the gills stayed with it during its dives and finally landed it.

Holder was named professor of zoology at Throop Technical Institute, the forerunner of today's CalTech, but it is difficult to believe that he did more than formally supervise instruction. For he not only fished the deep sea waters, he also fished the inland mountain streams and Crater Lake, hunted in Mexico, and sampled the wines of Santa Cruz Island with lyric delight:

"[The expert] has many secrets of the trade that rivals would give all they possess to filch. With what pride he holds up to the light this Burgundy! Rubies have stolen its color, surely—at least it is seen nowhere else. Then you must try this white wine, and the port of '73, a famous year; just a taste, of course, to get the bouquet. Then the sherries—liquid amber, and of a flavor unsurpassed. Then speaking of Zinfandel, look on this and this, drawing from a tun that would have floated a small yacht. Then the Tokay, not to speak of the brandy. Ah! how seductive it all is, and what with simply testing, smelling, many a tenderfoot has come out of the winery an exhilarated convert to the bouquet of the wines of that particular region."

He records with equal zest another use for wine: "One of the charming and little-known regions along the Sierra Nevada near San Francisco is Mission San Jose. Some years ago the winery caught fire and the water gave out. Some men might have been discouraged, but not so the vineyardists of Mission San Jose. The hose was led to the big claret tuns and the fire was extinguished with claret. The same experience was had with a winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains. A

forest fire threatened the buildings and valuable machinery and cut off the water, but ten thousand gallons of new wine pumped upon it in lieu of water saved the day."

At the same time, Holder kept firm links with Pasadena, and as a founding member of the Valley Hunt Club, rode to hounds in rough clothing after jackrabbits, bobcats and coyotes. He took part in the Valley Hunt's founding of the Rose Parade and from the beginning was an enthusiastic booster. His first publication in praise of his new home came out in 1888, published under the auspices of the Pasadena Board of Trade. Much of this material was expanded for a larger work, *All About Pasadena*, published in 1889. In it Holder praised the area, writing "it is not paradise, but to the tourist who has left the snow and ice of the East it is, perhaps, as near as can be expected." And just as for



Holder the essence of sportsmanship came from being gentlemanly, there was no mistaking why he felt at home in Pasadena, which he described as "a city built rapidly, yet without a vestige of the rough element that is to be found in the new cities of the inter-oceanic region," because it was founded by "refined and cultivated people from the great cities of the East." Holder certainly considered himself qualified to join this society. He descended from an old Quaker family, whose lineage he traced with pride in *The Holders of Holderness* (1902), and some years later he published a more general historical work, *The Quakers in England and America* (1913).

At the same time, Pasadena offered some exotic elements, as in its Chinatown, but even there Holder



offered it as a miniature and refined place, where one could examine safely and *in petto* the lures of opium and fan-tan.

Holder played and fought his record tuna for four hours over a distance of four miles, and later insisted that he could not have held out much longer. This same insistence on the risks taken by the sportsman shows in his accounts of riding to hounds. In *Life in the Open* (1906) he tells of the Valley Hunt's early days when they rode after jackrabbits, describing this as "hard, furious, dangerous sport, the hare having an open country and by far the advantage." Nevertheless, a number of deaths of the hare are recorded, whereas the members of the Valley Hunt Club lived charmed lives despite the hazards they faced.

Holder married Sarah Ufford in 1879, but she makes only one appearance throughout his writing, in a dedication to her as his companion. Though they had no children Holder was always aware of what growing up in the outdoor life of California could mean—to boys, of course—and he created his own sons in a splendid flight of romantic fiction, *The Adventures of Torqua* (1902), set in the eighteenth century. The plot revolves around a pair of young brothers, Raphael and Arturo, nephews of a cardinal, though with possibly even "higher" connections. They become pawns in a political struggle for power when they are stranded in California, but are befriended by Torqua, an Indian youth who learns of the plot against them. Torqua himself has longed to return to his island home from the harsh mission discipline imposed on him, and finally leads the trio in an escape to, of all places, Catalina. This gives the novelist a chance to write not only about the Indians but also about the interior of the island; for the boys are followed and must hide for many days, at least long enough to let their

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scape flora, fauna and man's nature. The two laws he formulated are still in force—those of abstinence and stamina which in the long run are essential for desert survival.

John Van Dyke came through Tucson from Southern California as a young man in search of health. He came at the turn of the century, going on foot over the three deserts—Mojave, Colorado, Sonora. While in town he sought out Professor Forbes for botanical information and Professor Blake for geological knowledge.

Old-timers had needlessly warned him not to go into the desert alone. They did not know that he was no tenderfoot. Although an art historian and librarian from Rutgers University, Van Dyke had been seasoned as a youth on the Sioux frontier.

"When I first began pushing into the interior from outlying stations," Van Dyke wrote years later, "there were plenty of old-timers to inform me that I was crazy and would 'get caught up with.' The reasons for their prediction were numerous. In the first place, I declined to dress in mining costume, with a flannel shirt, thick trousers, large felt hat and hobnailed boots. I wore a half-Indian, half-Mexican costume, consisting of nothing but a thin cotton shirt and trousers, a straw hat, and moccasins on my feet."

Van Dyke's desert odyssey took place over several years beginning in 1899. Although he had an Indian-bred horse, he usually led it, letting his fox terrier ride on the horse's back. He took his time, observing, resting, reflecting and recording the sense and wisdom of his book. He lived to an old age and wrote many more books, including one on the Grand Canyon. None surpassed *The Desert*.

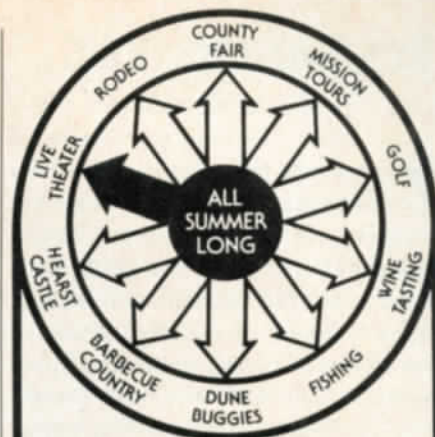
Of all the travelers who came this way, John Van Dyke is the one I would like most to have met. His book abides, magnifying the glory of summers spent in sun and shade and evening cool. W

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creator rehearse all he knows of eighteenth-century Catalina and its monuments. The boys' return, once the "right" faction has triumphed in Spain and on the mainland, is a bit of a let-down. Two years later Holder published *The Boy Anglers* (1904), an affectionately realistic account of the fishing adventures of his nephews.



That Holder's memory is green in Southern California, any visitor to the Tuna or the Valley Hunt can testify. An oil portrait hangs in the Tuna and a bust stands in the entrance hall. The Valley Hunt displays a rare copy of the memorial printed at his death, and one can see Holder in many of the pictures taken during the club's hunting days. Apparently no complete collection of his work can be found in the area where he lived his most productive years. Each library holds its own gathering, controlled by its own interests. No one has bothered to compile a bibliography or even a checklist of his more than thirty books and dozens of articles and papers. At first all this tends to irritate anyone riding in Holder's pursuit, but the chase itself becomes its own reward as one finds every excuse in the world to hit the freeways, consult the local collections, fly to Catalina to check out Holder Rock and the Tuna Club and impose on one's Valley Hunt friends. Certainly Holder himself would have preferred this activity to staying altogether indoors, and one feels a wry triumph of his personality in following him through all his enthusiasms and suspects that he would not be at all disturbed by the substitution of car for horse and plane for boat. W



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